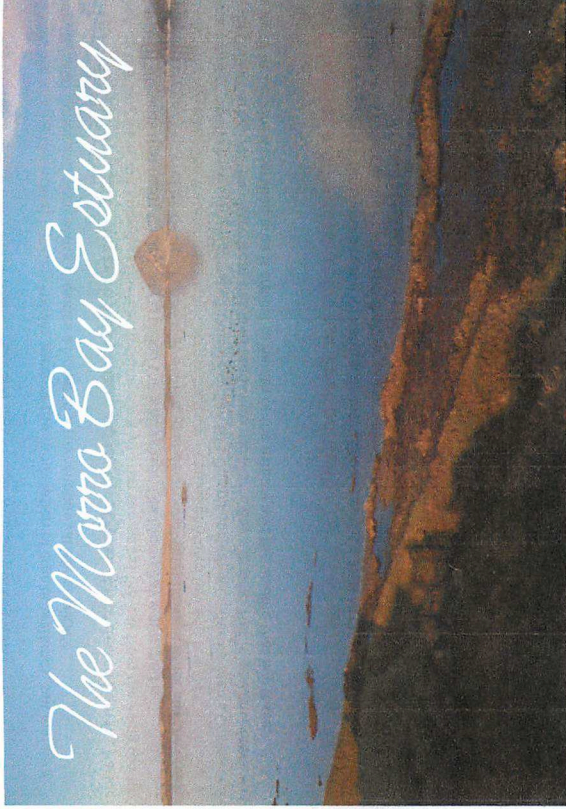


AGENDA ITEM: #6 - RUTLEDGE
DATE: DECEMBER 19, 2014

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View from the back deck

Our home is located in the beautiful **Morro Bay National and State Estuary**. We have gathered information that will help educate you about the area and also provide information on how to responsibly enjoy all it has to offer while minimizing any ecological impact in order to preserve and protect our local wildlife and the sensitive estuary environment. For full information please see the Morro Bay National Estuary Program website at <http://www.mbnep.org>. They have a wealth of useful and interesting information. You can also download a helpful (and beautiful!) map at: <http://www.mbnep.org/Library/Files/MBNEPmap.pdf>. These are some excerpts from their site and map to help you get started.

Always keep in mind: Morro Bay is precious to all of us. Here are three ways YOU can help keep it a beautiful, peaceful and thriving natural environment.

1. Be respectful of wildlife and waterfowl. If they react to your presence, you are probably too close. Bring binoculars if you would like a closer view.
2. Always pick up your trash. This helps prevent harm to people and wildlife.
3. Conserve water whenever possible, such as taking shorter showers, turning off the tap while brushing your teeth and waiting until you have full loads for dishes and laundry.

What Is An Estuary?

An estuary is a place where fresh water from creeks and rivers mixes with salty ocean water.

Estuaries are among the richest habitats known because the combination of creeks, wetlands, salt marshes, mudflats, sand dunes and open water provides a home to a tremendous variety of wildlife.

The Morro Bay estuary is 2300 acres and is fed by Chorro and Los Osos Creeks. It is protected from the Pacific Ocean by the long sand spit known as the Morro Dunes that you can see across the bay from the living room windows. The area that feeds the estuary is called the watershed. The Morro Bay watershed is approximately 48,000 acres made up of creeks, streams and underground water flows. It is not just the areas directly near the bay. The watershed reaches across the communities of Morro Bay and Los Osos, including a vast amount of open space along Highway 1 outside of San Luis Obispo, including California Men's Colony and Cuesta College area. All the water from this land feeds into the Morro Bay estuary. This is why environmental quality of this entire watershed area is critical to health of the estuary and the wildlife that live there.

Why Estuaries are Important for our Environment

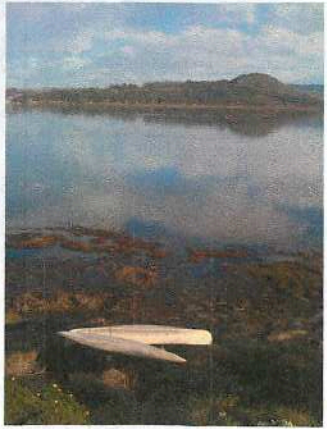
An estuary serves many functions beyond its natural beauty. The estuary is a **FISH NURSERY** for many species of fish that live as adults in the ocean. The shallow water, eelgrass beds and wetlands provide protected habitat and rich food sources for larvae and fry. Chorro and Los Osos Creeks also host steelhead trout, a threatened species that spawns in creeks but migrates to the sea.

The estuary is a **BIRD HABITAT** and an important stop-over on the Pacific Flyway and a critical winter home to numerous bird species. The bay and watershed rank among top sites during the Audubon Winter Bird Count.

The estuary is also a **LIVING FOSSIL**, a rare example of the lagoons and wetlands that were once common along the southern California coast. Since 2007, Morro Bay has also been designated as a Marine Protected Area.

How to Enjoy the Morro Bay Estuary

You'll be amazed at the variety of birds and waterfowl you will see over your morning coffee from our house (the star on the map). Take a moment to step outside on the deck and listen to the way the sounds of the birds, breezes and water movement travel across the water. Sometimes, you can even hear a conversation from kayakers out in the bay! (Beware, that means they can hear you, too!) Watch for the crane-like herons to rise majestically when they take flight.



View from the back deck



Long-billed Curlew

If you want to be more adventurous than bird-watching from the back deck, there are several ways to enjoy the estuary either within walking distance or a short drive away. *Each of the following numbered items is marked with a corresponding number on the map on page 5. The map is from the Morro Bay National Estuary program website and is available in its entirety online.*

1. Just a block away at the end of Fourth St. and our street, Santa Lucia, you will find the **Audubon Overlook**. This is a sheltered overlook that provides a quiet location to bird watch. Be sure to bring your binoculars! If you're a bird lover, watch for the annual *Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival*. You

can find information at

<http://www.morrobaybirdfestival.org/> or on Facebook.

At final count, 204 species were officially sighted in 2014. The website has the complete list.

2. **The Elfin Forest Natural Preserve** protects a rare coastal dune scrub habitat and a forest of miniature oak trees. It is a fun hike along the boardwalk trails that is very popular with bird watchers.
3. If you walk on Second St. back toward town and continue walking around the bay, you will reach the **Sweet Springs Natural Preserve**. It includes a freshwater pond that is a home to turtles and red-legged frogs. This makes a great morning walk that you can top off with a cappuccino at the Back Bay Café on Second Street next to the Back Bay Inn on your way back home. The Back Bay Café is popular with locals in the mornings no matter what the weather. It is also home to the Baywood Navy, whose motto is "We don't sail in water deeper than we can stand in."
4. **The Morro Dunes Natural Preserve** is an extension of Montaña de Oro National Park. It is a seven-mile long sand spit that shields Morro Bay from the open ocean. Endangered snowy plovers nest on this beach from March to September. The sand dunes themselves are incredibly beautiful. You can drive there, but we prefer renting a kayak from the folks by the Morro State Park Marina and paddling across to the Dunes. Just make sure you time the tides right so you don't find yourself paddling through mud. We have had some hilarious times getting stuck in the mud, but it definitely slows down your journey and it's not for everyone.
5. **The Morro Estuary Natural Preserve** is a beautiful place to kayak when the tide is high enough to go through the channels. Remember to keep a respectful distance from wildlife and waterfowl. This is protected as a natural habitat preserve.



Great Blue Heron taking flight



Hiking on the Dunes at Thanksgiving

6. **Morro Bay State Park** covers 2700 acres and includes camping and other amenities. A short but steep trail leads to the top of Black Hill with its amazing views. There's a lovely golf course across the street from the Marina and the club house, which is up the hill off the higher road, is open to the public. They have a beautiful patio where you can sit outside and enjoy the incredible views.

7. **Morro Bay State Park and Marina and the Marina Peninsula Trail.** The

Marina trail is at the south end of the parking lot and is open to hikers but no dogs or bikes are allowed. This is where we rent kayaks and canoes. You can rent singles or doubles. You can reserve them but we've never had trouble getting kayaks without calling ahead. The great thing about a double kayak is you can chat with each other and have someone to pick up the slack if your arms get tired from paddling—or you get stuck in the mud.



Celebrating our annual "Sisters' Weekend" with a kayak trip to the Dunes

8. **The Morro Bay State Park Museum of Natural History** is great for geology, archeology and ecology buffs. It focuses on the local area and the museum has very knowledgeable docents to guide you through their exhibits.
9. **Heron Rookery Natural Preserve and Windy Cove** have eucalyptus and cypress trees that provide rooting and nesting sites for cormorants, egrets and herons. Spring is the time for watching brooding behavior. Since you're already practically in Morro Bay, head on over to Giovanni's fish market along the water in Morro Bay for some fresh fish to cook for dinner.
10. And last, but by no means least, if the tide is low, you can walk down to the bay from the back of the house. If you head south (to the left facing the water), you can walk completely around to the south



The Heron Rookery display

side of Baywood Park by the Back Bay Inn. It's got some muddy spots but it is amazingly beautiful to see how the view changes as you go around the edge of Baywood. We all own a pair of 'bay shoes' that we don't mind getting muddy. After a nice bay walk, scrape the mud off your shoes and head over to the funky and fun Baywood Ale House on Third and Santa Maria for a drink.

Remember, YOU can help keep the Morro Bay Estuary and our community a beautiful, peaceful and thriving natural environment with 3 simple rules:

1. Be respectful of wildlife
2. Pick up your trash
3. Conserve water

Morro Bay Estuary Map excerpted from the Morro Bay National Estuary Program available for download at <http://www.mbnep.org/Library/Files/MBNEPmap.pdf>

